

# A GOLDFIELDS JOURNAL

OR

A Guide to Prospective  
Gold Seekers

N.W.R. Country Areas Programme  
BY  
Balkanad.

**NICHOLAS JACOB ROWE**

recently returned from the Gold  
Rushes at Fields Town, Goldfields &c, &c.

(The French  
measures of length  
and weight are included for  
the benefit of French immigrants.)

Price – Six pence

1854

**SUZE PORT HOUSE  
PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS  
Main Street, Suze Port\***

\* © Trevor K. Jacob 1986





# Contents

New Arrivals	1
Suze Port	1
Lodgings	2
Town Outskirts	2
"New Chums"	2
<i>The Angus Gazette</i>	3
Weather	3
Information for Travellers	4
Walking to the Fields	6
Travelling by Wagon	7
Horses	7
Licences and Licence Dodging	8
Bushrangers	9
The Mining Camps	9
Fields Town	10
Briggs' Store	10
The Hospital	12
Health	12
Accidents	13
Exchanging Gold	14
The Bank of Australasia	14
Cobb & Co.	14
Life in the Camps	15
Pegging a Claim	16
How to Pan for Gold	18
Operating a Cradle	18
Long Toms	19
Puddling	19
Reef Gold	19
Operating a Shaft	20
Dryblowing in Desert Areas	20
Big Mines	20
Town Councils	22
Crime and Grog Shops	22
Goldfields Women	23
Chinese	23
Squatters	24
Are You a Miner?	24





## New Arrivals

The *Anna* entered the harbour, edging among a host of other vessels, a forest of masts and rigging rising above the water. We leant over the rails to glimpse the land of fortune. Stunted forest with leaves of dreary, grey-green spread down to the sandy coast. The land shimmered in the sun, and the smell of eucalypt came to meet us. Nothing could be more different to the ordered hedgerows, fields and gardens of England.

When the *Anna* docked, we stepped onto a crowded jetty. The wharf was jammed with carters, all competing to carry our baggage. The place is rough and ready, hastily built with no planning; a ramshackle mixture of storage sheds, shops and shelters spreads along the beach, with only a few brick and stone houses. It is easy to imagine how small and sleepy the port was before gold was found and the rush began.

## Suze Port

All the gold miners disembark here at Suze Port. It is full of immigrants and fortune hunters – a great variety of characters, all going to the diggings, quite a few intent on preying on others. Word has it that normally sensible townsfolk are leaving their jobs and, gold mad, are heading off, even those who have never held anything heavier than a goose-quill!

Ships' masters cannot keep their crews. The sailors desert and head for the diggings, leaving ships stranded in the harbour. The local paper reported that the ship *Tulloch Castle* was short-handed and "If any crew will return to their ship's duties, no proceedings will be taken against them, and they will receive their normal wages for the voyage to Bombay." And sailors have always been whipped or executed for desertion!

Suze Port is busy; there is plenty of work for those who stay, and, because workers are scarce, the wages are good. However, with news of "big finds" arriving every day, the inhabitants are tempted away. One day the place may develop into an important town, but, for the moment, it exists only for gold.

It is a boom town with dirty and unlit streets (or, rather, winding dirt tracks). The new buildings are badly built, and advertise their owners' wares with flimsy garish signs – importers, lawyers, printers, banks, shops and inns. The crowded streets are cluttered by horses hitched to wooden railings. In winter, the ground is mud – carts, horses and people churn and skid their way from wharf to town, con-

tinually turning the soil until it is like a ploughed field. In summer it becomes ankle-deep, choking dust.

## **Lodgings**

Lodgings are scarce. There were no beds at the inn for us, at least none that we could afford. For ten shillings we could sleep in a communal room – a depressing first night! The room was a stuffy dormitory crowded with flea-ridden stretchers occupied by all sorts of people. There were new arrivals with shiny boots and starched shirt collars that stuck out from beneath the old blankets. Alongside were diggers, some in a drunken sleep, most dressed in lairy red, gold and striped shirts.

Some lodgings are cruder. A few inn-keepers offer stables at five shillings a night. If you have nowhere else to go, and it's raining, you can pay this and sleep on clean straw, clinging to a borrowed rug. You bed down in a stall, sharing it with at least two others, and perhaps a horse.

## **Town Outskirts**

The goldrush started overnight. No preparation could be made for the influx. (The population multiplied more than one hundred times in the six months after gold was found.) There are only five law officers to keep the peace. A canvas town has sprung up, tent occupants paying five shillings a week to rent a patch of land. The hotch-potch homes are built from any available materials; some show remarkable inventiveness – patchwork quilts, aprons, petticoats, blankets and ship's sails, anything that might keep out the elements. Crude signs and flags are used to advertise blacksmiths, butchers, doctors and tea-rooms. Occupants cook outside the entrances and rubbish lies about, uncollected, trampled into the mud by the traffic, ultimately rotting and stinking. The tent city is illegal and unhealthy, but what can be done about it? If one area is cleared, another takes its place.

## **"New Chums"**

Before heading to the diggings you need mining equipment. Also, the clothes you wore in an office, for instance, will be no use for



mining. Prices keep rising all the time, but equipment and supplies are much cheaper in Suze Port than at the goldfields.

Newcomers are everywhere and are scorned by the locals. They are called "new chums", and it takes at least three years to become an accepted "old chum" in the colony. By this time the men will have sprouted a moustache or beard, have a sun-browned skin, and be dressed in a brightly coloured shirt, moleskins and a cabbage-tree hat. The women are equally tanned and flamboyant – they also wear somewhat shorter skirts than in the cities because this keeps the hems out of the dirt.

## *The Angus Gazette*

This newspaper reports all the news in the Suze Port area and the diggings. It also carries stories from other mining areas, some of them foreign.

## **Weather**

During summer, there are hot winds, choking dust and thousands of flies swarming around you. Travellers should take enough water to last any journey, or they should *know* where they can get water along the way, since many of the creeks dry up in the hot weather. Some travellers, usually footsloggers, have died of thirst.

The fierce heat will blister a new chum's skin. If you are not used to hard manual work in the open air, you might suffer sun-stroke. Hundreds of men and women are blinded with Sandy Blight – an eye disease thought to be caused by hot winds blowing dust about.

In the winter the rains come and it can be bitterly cold. The dusty roads become a quagmire. The wagons plough up the track, and the poor beasts can wallow knee-deep in mud. Vehicles have been bogged for weeks; sometimes three teams of bullocks are needed to pull them from mud-holes. You are likely to see horses coated with mud to their girths, and footsore travellers sliding along behind in the oozing muck.

Flooding is another danger. Flash floods at river crossings or in gullies can wash away men and beasts with little warning. In the rivers and creeks there are areas of quicksand. Most of these are unmarked and are terribly dangerous.

Try to avoid quicksand and mud-holes at all costs, thus saving yourself precious time, and, more importantly, your livestock.

## Information for Travellers

The roads to the diggings are bad, summer or winter. They are unlike the carriageways of England, being raw dirt tracks that wind through the bush, following the paths forced by the first diggers. Of course, the convenience of travelling by modern steam locomotives is unknown here. There are no railway tracks in the interior of the colony, although I have heard talk of a line being built in Melbourne.

There are two main tracks to the goldfields; Trickey's Track is the better and more popular of these. The shorter route is down the Pass Road, but few travellers choose it because the surface is more difficult for all forms of transport and the track is thus more isolated.

The main track is always crowded, and is further cluttered by broken vehicles abandoned along the way. Often you'll see exhausted men and women lying on the edge of the track, unable to finish their journey. Fellow travellers are so lost with gold fever that they won't stop to help anyone; even those with room on their drays just keep going. It is like a mob of refugees fleeing a battlefield.

*The Angus* reported one great jam of traffic, which occurred where the Pass Road leaves Trickey's Track and heads south-east. "Dozens of drays and thousands of miners waited, making final preparations and deciding which route to take. Mixed amongst the bunch were ele-

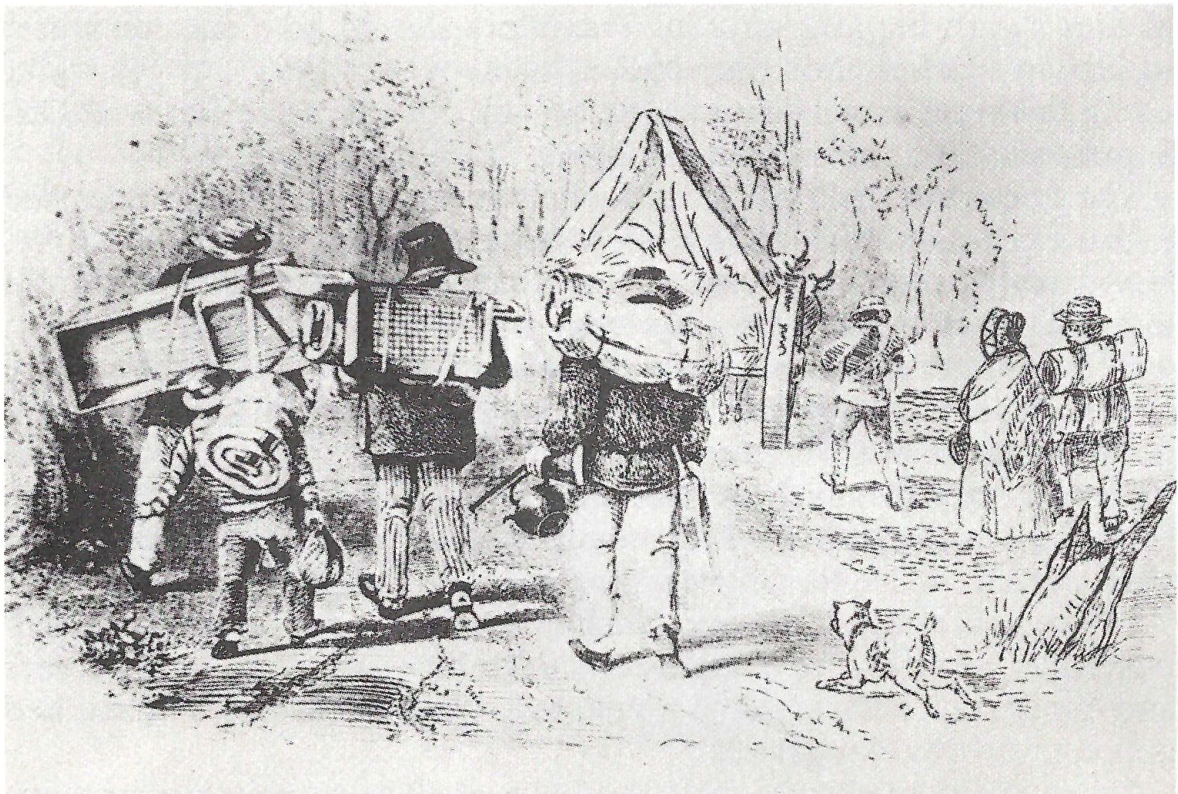


Figure 1: The road to the diggings



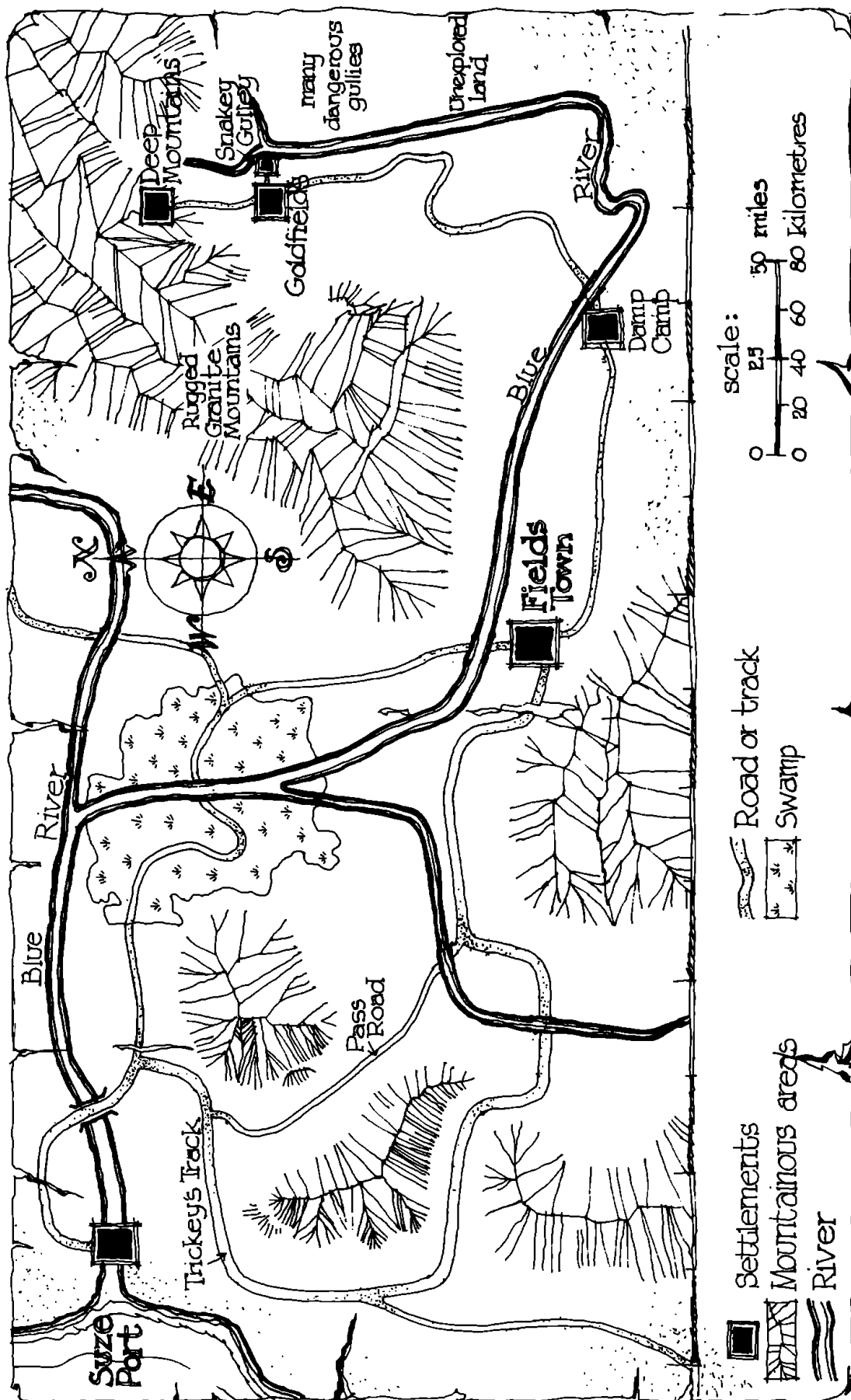


Figure 2: A map of the area

gant gentlemen on fine-boned horses, kilted Scotsmen, runaway sailors still wearing their sea-garb, servants and shepherds, immigrants from many lands, honest men and cut-throats. Their worldly goods were stacked in carts, drays or wheelbarrows, or were strapped to their backs, as were their children." So many villains are drawn here that you should be armed.

Life on the roads is the first taste of the goldfields, the first step towards hardship, isolation and privation. Every day fortune hunters depart civilisation for a miner's life. Those employed at Suze Port are the first to become restless and bored with their jobs. Then it's off to the fields, changing their lives completely. Most have no idea what they are getting into.

## Walking to the Fields

Walking is the cheapest way to get there. "Footsloggers" must realise how long it will take – the distances are huge compared with England and Europe. However, those with little money will choose to walk. Thousands of diggers are travelling by foot, although many who set out never reach their destination.

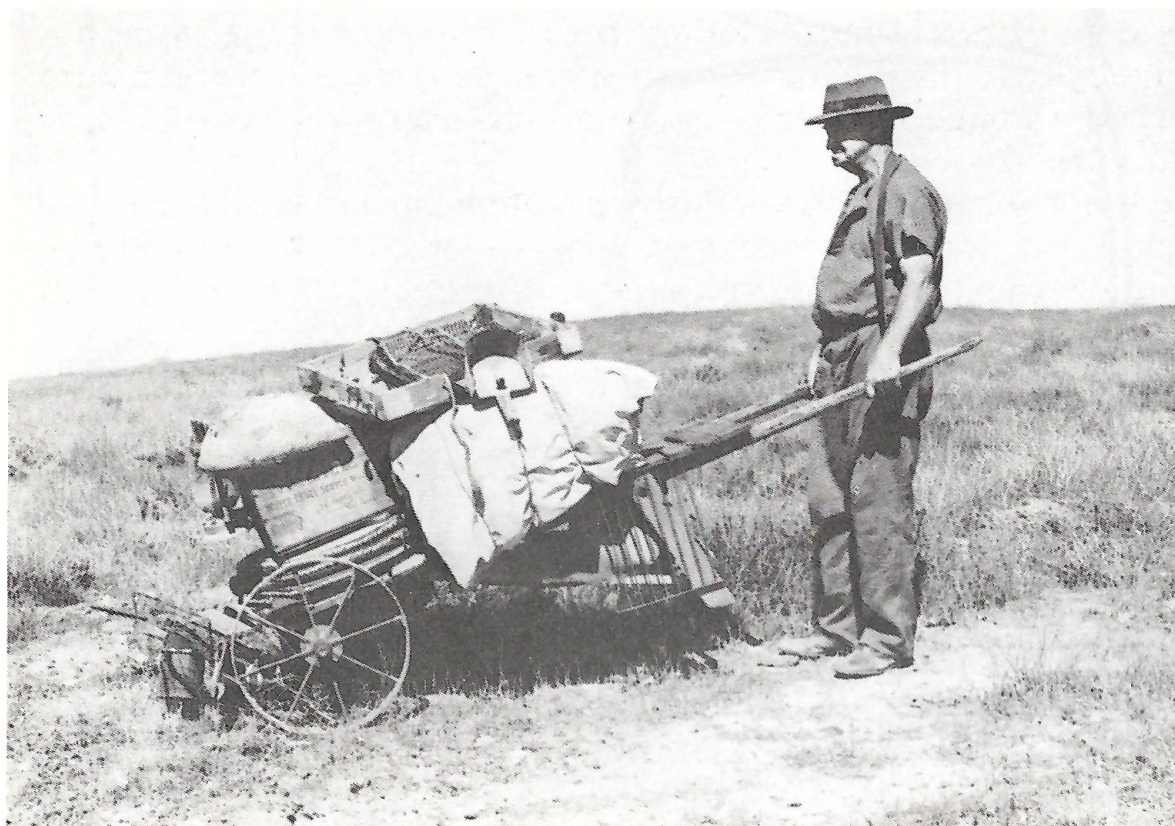


Figure 3: On the road with a handcart



Walkers usually "hump their swags", their belongings rolled up in a blanket and cast across their shoulders. All sorts of contraptions are used to push and drag goods. *The Angus* reported that one group pushed handcarts 400 miles (640 kilometres) from Suze Port to places in the desert.

## Travelling by Wagon

Some lucky diggers travel by cart or wagon. It's not cheap to buy one, but many wagon owners are glad to take a few pounds from anyone who wants a ride.

Prepare carefully. Some travellers are stark, staring, gold-mad and head off with nothing. If they don't die on the way, they arrive with no tools, money or shelter. Others take too much. Picture two bullock drays being loaded in Main Street, Suze Port. One hundred people are scrambling about, all planning to ride these vehicles to the diggings. They also have cradles for washing gold, wheelbarrows, dozens of tin dishes, beds and assorted boxes, ropes, frying-pans, ovens, stretchers, tarpaulins, quart and pint pots, buckets, guns, sieves, picks, crowbars, spades, and a host of unseen articles! Beginners who start out with too many belongings are often forced to throw them away some distance down the road. All sorts of things are to be found along the way. Chests of fancy clothes, books, beds, and china basins are of little use in the mining areas. A scavenger could sell these in Suze Port for a wonderful profit, but few people head away from the fields and so the goods lie rotting.

It is not uncommon to see thirty or more bullocks yoked to a single dray. The drivers cajole the beasts along, swearing loudly and cracking enormous whips over their heads to force the poor creatures through the mud.

## Horses

Going to the diggings on horseback is the quickest, but horses are expensive. It is best to ride one and lead a pack-horse or mule; otherwise, you can either carry very little or you walk while the horse carries a larger load.

The dealers will cheat you if have no knowledge of horses. Buy a brumby if possible; they are best in drought and areas of scanty forage, and can travel hard country and put up with hard times. They will find water, sometimes by scratching for it in sandy creek beds. These horses are bred in the bush and will not touch poisonous plants.

Don't use an English saddle; they are too heavy, too smooth and too hard on the horse's back.

## Licences and Licence Dodging

Recently an official advertisement stated "Certain persons have begun searching for gold on government land, without the authority to do so. Such persons will be prosecuted unless they obtain the necessary licence." It went on to say that a miner's licence must be produced any time a policeman or some other person representing the government demanded to see it. Prospective diggers should consider purchasing one to avoid trouble.

To mine legally, you must buy this piece of paper, which presently costs thirty shillings a month. That is one shilling a day, or eighteen pounds a year, when a labourer's wage is five shillings a week, and shepherds receive a miserable ten pounds a year! The licence fee will probably become even higher. The authorities want to make it so expensive that people will be forced back to work in the towns and on the land. They think it would be "better for the community" if there were no gold mining (except by the big companies) and no gold towns. They really mean it would be better for them. The men in authority are the rich men, and they hate seeing their cheap labour take off to the diggings.

Writers for *The Angus* continually question the high price of licences. "In Castlemaine, pedestrians must wade deep in mud and water. In one accident two drays broke their axle-tree shafts. It took ten men standing up to their waists in water several hours to free them. These men, furious at the state of the streets, swore never to pay the licence again; they said they'd rot in jail first." It's hard for the government to provide amenities for such a quickly growing and widespread community, but there'll be rebellion soon unless the licence fee is lowered. Murderers go free because of the shortage of law enforcement officers, while there are plenty of troopers, many of them brutal, to harry miners for their licences.

Already many miners refuse to pay the licence. Some have made an art of hiding during the regular digger hunts. The police continually harass the miners, whose discontent is growing all the time.

An acquaintance of mine was caught by a rough-looking sergeant and was marched off to "the logs" (this means being chained to a fallen tree) before appearing in court. My mate offered the sergeant a five pound note, whereon he was released. A lot of the police are good men following orders, but a lot are as corrupt as five-day-old fish.



## Bushrangers

At first robbers were referred to as highwaymen, but these vagabonds hide in the bush waiting for their quarry, so they are called "bushrangers". Some of the robbers are "old lags" or ex-convicts.

Carry a gun for protection – and make sure it is loaded. The authorities offer little protection in return for your licence fee, but you can't complain about that when you're dead. In the evening, just to warn those in nearby camps, you should fire a few shots to empty your gun. Then place fresh powder in the chamber. Now all those within hearing distance know you are armed and ready to defend yourself.

## The Mining Camps

Few diggers expect to be at the diggings long, and fewer still think that they will have to work hard to make a fortune. Once at the diggings, a miner might not see a town for weeks or months, sometimes years. An unlucky digger is soon reduced to poverty, left to live off



Figure 4: A comfortable camp at the diggings

the land, or forced to return to town to find a job. Many mining camps last only as long as the gold; most are destined to become ghost towns.

In the scattered mining camps around Goldfields – Damp Camp, Snakey Gully and Deep Mountains – the work is tough, but there is always a chance to make a fortune.

## **Fields Town**

This settlement is the largest in the Goldfields area. Six months ago it was a quiet bush valley adjoining Blue River. Now there is a street about a mile long and wide enough to turn a bullock team. Briggs Street is lined on both sides with buildings that centre around the "Shamrock Hotel" and the other well-established businesses. Most structures are hastily built from easily-obtained materials – usually tin and rough-hewn wood. Further along all you find are tents. Even the hospital is a series of calico tents.

Other tents belong to store-keepers, butchers, doctors, barbers, bankers, smithies, eating houses, refreshment sellers and tradesmen. Then a horde of diggers' tents and hovels spread into the distance. Only half the inhabitants are directly involved with digging for gold. The rest of the residents supply the miners' wants, whether these be food, supplies, equipment, or refreshments and amusements. More and more "paper swells" or "pencil pushers" are attracted to town. These clerks work with the police, council offices, banks, legal rooms, licensing and claims halls, and so on.

If you are wondering where to begin to make your fortune, consider trying short-term work in Fields Town. Some towns have become beacons on maps because of their fabulously rich gold discoveries – Ballaarat, Ophir, Turon, Bendigo, Eaglehawk Gully, Echunga, Fingal, Maryborough, Hill End, Calliope, Rushworth, Tarrangower, Rocky River and so on. All of these held a fortune, at least for the first-comers, and the thousands of followers had the dazzling hope before them. I wonder if any of these places will be important in the future, after the gold is finished?

## **Briggs' Store**

Not everyone digs for gold. Briggs' Supplies is a gold mine in itself. Built on a back section of Fields Town at the end of Briggs Street, the store sells anything and everything to diggers and townspeople. It also



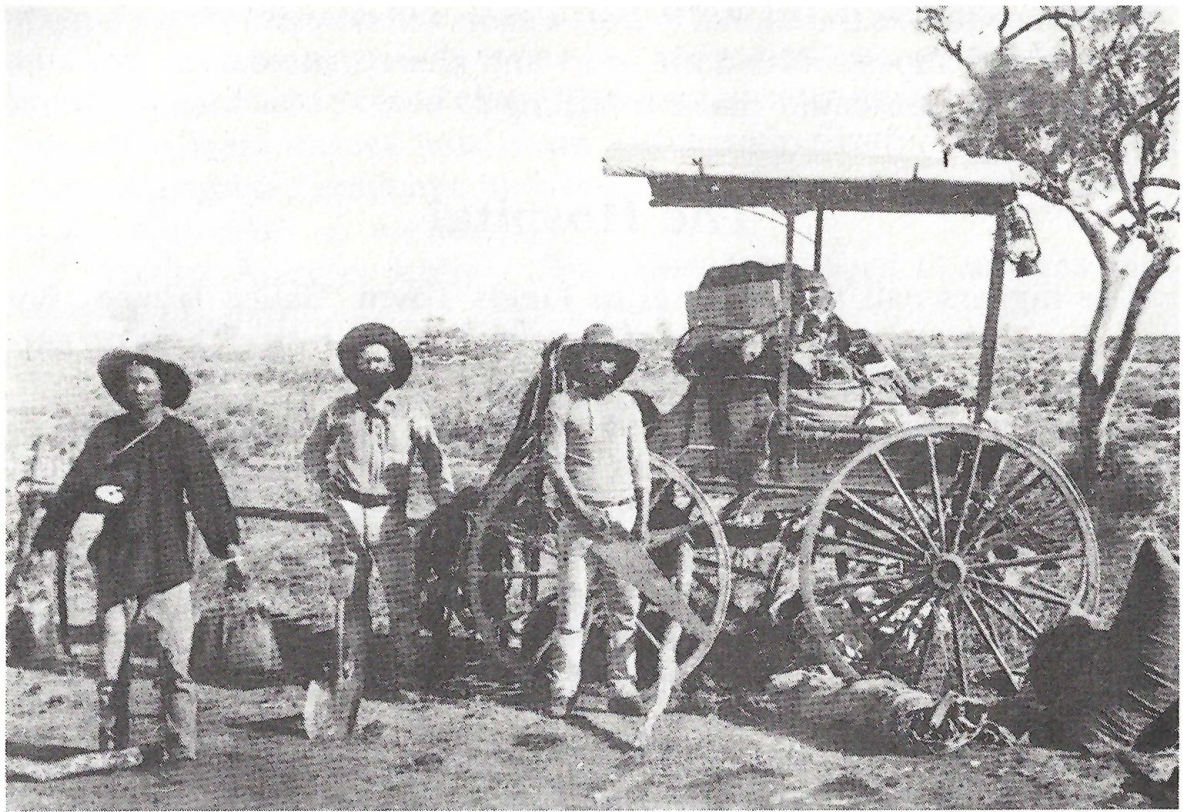


Figure 5: The Briggs' Express

runs the Briggs' Express, a carrier service that transports supplies to nearby camps.

All supplies are expensive. Demand is so great that the supply of goods cannot keep up, and the storekeepers can charge what they like. The suppliers – food sellers, spirit sellers and those who buy the diggers' gold – are, some say, more likely to make a fortune than the diggers. Goods for every need and occasion are for sale – sugar candy, potted anchovies, East India Pickles, Venice turpentine, Stephens' Blistering Ointment, linseed oil, spring-carts, waterproof tents, pistols and shotguns, Peck Co.'s Superior Flake Chocolate, Laver and Co.'s Cordial, biscuits from Simpson and Bell (and some from Peek Freans), tin dishes and everything you might need for mining, from a pick to a needle. *The Angus* recently quoted what must be a record sale – a miner's pan was selling for £16.

Bullockies haul the supplies from Suze Port on overloaded drays. By the time they finally reach the store, the goods *are* expensive because the freight costs are high. The store might charge 5 shillings for a bucket of water, £20 for a hundredweight (50 kilograms) of flour, and up to 5 shillings for a 4 pound (1.8 kilogram) loaf of bread. It's no wonder that the diggers' diet consists mainly of tea, mutton and damper!



Anyone who has the capital to start a shop will do well. With a supply of boots and shoes, bottled ale, port and sherry, moleskins or picks and shovels, you could make a "killing".

## The Hospital

The diggers call the hospital in Fields Town "Calico House". No wonder, since it is a collection of tents packed with stretchers on earthen floors. My advice to diggers is not to get sick.

As you travel around Goldfields, look after your health. Scores of people have died from dysentery; other forms of disease are rife, and there have been some horrible accidents, so be cautious. Living conditions are appalling. Damp blankets, shanty houses, poor diets, unwashed bodies, lack of water and sanitation all help breed disease. Epidemics are common – typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever, whooping cough, measles, scurvy and meningitis. Dirty water is a frequent cause of sickness, as are the flies.

The story is the same everywhere, according to *The Angus*. Nurses and doctors are few, and hospitals are even rarer. Often it is left to volunteers to care for the needy. A mate of mine considered becoming a doctor once; the pay was good but the hours were too long, and one would not be free to travel about the fields. Doctors! Most are not at all! Beware of tradesmen (butchers and bakers) who charge £10 to perform surgery. I would rather be treated by a horse-coper than by some of the "doctors" on the diggings.

I read in the gazette about two well-prepared doctors, both from Parramatta. They arrived with a portable hospital, complete with "a dozen folded tents, twenty-five collapsible stretchers and fifty coffins filled with flour. They sold the flour on the fields for double what they paid for it, emptying the containers, which waited to store the next items. With so many villains and so much sickness around, the good doctors will make money twice over with their coffins."

At isolated mining camps like Snakey Gully, the only answer is bush medicine. I saw one miner have a gash stitched with a hair from a horse's tail, there being nothing else available.

## Health

Avoid dirty living areas. These contribute most to the death of people here. A government official reported that Cromwell must be the dirtiest town in the country. "I have made a general inspection to find the most insanitary conditions. Rubbish is cast everywhere; offal and

scraps are simply thrown down the river bank, creating a most revolting stench, especially near the piggeries and cowyards. Mr Goodger's yard alone could cause disease and sickness throughout the town. Goodness knows how clean the drinking-water is!"

A recent typhoid epidemic took twenty-two lives at Cromwell. Here are the obituaries of one family:

Matilda Margret Scally – Died 30th April, aged 11 months and 23 days

John Scally – Died 27th March, aged 7 years and 3 months

Mary Scally – Died 2nd April, aged 5 years and 2 months

Sarah Scally – Died 7th April, aged 6 years and 3 months

Daniel Scally – Died 7th April, aged 3 years and 7 months

Ellen Scally (their mother) – Died 1st April, aged 29 years

## Accidents

Disease kills more people than do accidents, and only rarely is anyone killed by bushrangers or natives. Accidents involving cave-ins or explosions are usually caused by miners' carelessness. Otherwise accidents are caused by falling trees, snakes, fire in town and scrub, or flash flooding (particularly in steep gullies).

The Blue River has a history of catching miners unprepared, demolishing huts and sweeping away cradles. Occasionally miners have been swept away and their bodies found downstream days later.

Landslides and cave-ins occur in shaft mining areas as well as along rivers. Take precautions. Avoid cave-ins and flooding by installing timber supports and pumps big enough to drain away excess water.

Do not ignore safety for the lure of gold. Two miners, Iain Campbell and John Jones, were about to descend their shaft when Campbell, defying mining regulations, asked for a parcel of blasting powder weighing about five pounds (2.3 kilograms) to be placed on the platform on which they would lower themselves. They were down about fifteen feet (4.6 metres) when Campbell lit his candle – and the fuse. Both men scrambled on to the capstan rope above the bucket. In a few moments the powder exploded. . . . Campbell was hurled to the bottom of the shaft and killed, while Jones held on and eventually recovered in the hospital.

Not all accidents end in disaster. I heard a tale about three miners who had been trying to uncover a quartz reef using explosives.

They were short of supplies and decided to throw a bomb in a waterhole and blow up a catch of fish. They made their "bomb" from lots of blasting powder sewn in canvas.

Somehow their dog got hold of the bomb and dragged its fuse through the camp fire. It is not clear what happened next, but there were reports of mad panic and a nearby public house nearly being wrecked by an explosion.

## **Exchanging Gold**

You can swap gold for money or goods almost anywhere, but the rates of exchange vary. If you visit the storekeeper's tent in any of the camps, you will get much less money for your gold than in a bank. Watch how your gold is weighed, check the weights used and look carefully at the scales. Even if the exchanger's tools are fair, the rate is generally low. It may be worth the trip to Fields Town to swap your gold.

Most miners keep some gold dust or small nuggets to use in emergencies and sell the rest. The government eventually buys most of this gold.

## **The Bank of Australasia**

Fields Town's major buildings are the banks. They may not look much, but they do a roaring trade. Hordes of diggers come to town to exchange their gold. Afterwards they spend up big – gambling and carousing, often losing a small fortune overnight.

Building materials are almost unobtainable in town, although the Bank of Australasia has a more substantial look than most buildings. There is a glass window looking onto the street and the manager's quarters are at the rear. Inside there is a fireplace at one end and the manager's bed and the safe are at the other. A few remodelled gin cases serve as the banker's desk.

## **Cobb & Co.**

Cobb & Co. coaches transport travellers with money, not ordinary diggers. They carry the gold from Fields Town to Suze Port, where it is shipped overseas.

I paid for a ride once. The driver was a Yankee, sporting a long whip, long pistols, and a long, sharp Bowie knife. He had wild hair and beard – the sight of him alone might frighten bushrangers. The team sped



along with mud flying, stones shying, and diggers scattering and cursing as they dodged the heavy wheels. The coach slides across swampy patches and bounces over rocky ones equally badly. Three small strong boxes sat on the floor between myself and a surly trooper. They were empty apart from a few blankets and provisions such as horse oats, but on the return journey they would hold a king's ransom.

Driving the coaches is dangerous and the pay isn't good. Most of the drivers are in it for adventure: that's about all you'll get, apart from a bruised backside. The escort guards are a useless bunch; they'd be very little help if you were bailed up by bushrangers.

## Life in the Camps

A tent is vital. Some prospectors make do with any kind of shelter – humpies made from tree branches and tussock grass, overhanging rocks, even caves. They graduate into tents as soon as possible, but anything more secure is a waste. When the gold runs out a miner must move on.

Some are very temporary camps. More permanent shelters have appeared at Damp Camp, Snakey Gully and Deep Mountains. Initially



Figure 6: The first comers to a new strike

the settlements stretch along a creek bed where miners can wash their dirt. The land around a new camp changes quickly. Trees are cut, claims are pegged and tents are erected. At first everyone fossicks and pans with dishes. Within a few days of a strike, thousands of miners arrive and a tent settlement springs up, with diggers working furiously everywhere.

The diggers identify their tents and hovels by names painted on boards or by coloured flags. One is called Buckingham Palace. Not to be outdone, a shabbier residence is called Windsor Castle! Nearby are Westminster Abbey and the House of Lords.

Stories and news race through the camps – there are tales of success and of hardship, and of miners who have eaten £10 notes in mutton sandwiches, or used fivers to light cigars. There are stories about diggers who have had horseshoes and harnesses made of gold. Others have paid for delicacies with bags of gold dust . . . or have they? No one knows what is truth and what is not.

Night at Snakey Gully is a crazy experience. It is almost impossible to find your way through the camp. Move carefully, or, better still, stay in your tent. Revolvers crack; a man with a broken leg groans; drunken miners yell; others sing songs – different songs, and to different tunes. One man is heard shouting because he could not find the way to his hole, while another screams because he has fallen into his.

I never venture from my tent, night or day, without a loaded revolver, and I always sleep with it beside me. A drunk, hell-hound or madman might attack at any time, but, I repeat, it is best not to stir at night. Still, I suppose the danger gives some glamour to a dingy mudfield.

## **Pegging a Claim**

Numerous miners will race off to peg a claim at the vaguest rumour of a new strike. Sometimes a false report might be circulated. One digger told me he was the victim of a hoax, and ran four miles after other fortune seekers. It was all in vain.

Peg your claim with stakes. Cover an area about 12 feet square (roughly 4 metres square), as this is all any digger is allowed. Initial the stakes, then connect them with rope. The area is not large, but big enough to dig down, then perhaps along. You may have to defend your claim – claim-jumpers sometimes use force to try to take a piece of dirt. You can expect little help from the law on isolated or crowded diggings.





Figure 7: Panning for gold



## How to Pan for Gold

If you are alone or in a small group, you should hunt for surface gold. To pan, either dig some earth from near the river and add a little water, or take a scoop from the riverbed. Swirl the mixture round until the sand is suspended in water, then carefully tip out the water and suspended dirt. Only the heaviest grains will sink to the bottom, and any gold will be in this residue. This process is simple and cheap, but slow, and other methods give better results. Poor diggers have been known to try washing for gold with a washbasin, saucepan or hat instead of a pan!

In summer, if the creeks dry, some miners lug wash dirt over long distances to find water, while others pile up mined earth waiting for the winter rains.

## Operating a Cradle

Cradling for gold usually takes more than one person. A cradle is a wooden box set on rockers. Inside are shelves set along its bottom, and these catch gold particles as the cradle is rocked. One miner rocks the cradle while another throws dirt and water inside. This is difficult



Figure 8: Working a cradle

work. Mud can easily cover the shelves, so the cradle must be cleaned often if the gold is to be caught. Cradling is the easiest and surest way of finding gold, but never in such large quantities as are possible with shaft mining.

## **Long Toms**

These are sluices, longer versions of cradles. They are used in areas with plenty of gold and water. A long tom can be as much as 24 feet (7.3 metres) long, eighteen inches (460 millimetres) wide, with foot (300 millimetre) high sides. Miners usually band together to operate a machine efficiently.

## **Puddling**

Sometimes miners use a large wooden tub, filled with a mixture of dirt and water. A miner will stand there and puddle – that is swirl the contents with his spade, drawing muddy water to the top and leaving heavier deposits, including gold, on the bottom.

The waste water is tipped out and the residual gravel is put in the hopper, the top part of a cradle.

There are puddling machines at large camps like Snakey Gully. Miners can rent the machine, which is a large circular washing tank powered by a horse. Watch closely. The owner puddles the diggers' mud, so you must keep your eye on your piece of dirt!

## **Reef Gold**

Not all gold is alluvial gold, which is close to the surface or in the rivers and is easy to get at. Reef gold is embedded in veins of quartz rock that must be crushed before the gold can be retrieved. One way to crush the ore is to put it in an iron cylinder and pound it with an iron bar. (Miners call this a dolly pot.)

It is best to begin a shaft mine by forming a company and working with others, because it is very expensive. Shafts can be dug deep, straight through the topsoil to the pipeclay and slate beds beneath. Here is where the reef might be – usually 20 to 100 feet (6 to 30 metres) down. When a hole is "bottomed", horizontal tunnels (drives) are dug. Sometimes there are so many drives that two miners tunnel into each other, or cause each other cave-ins.

## **Operating a Shaft**

A timber windlass is built above the shaft entrance; that is, three fastened poles are tied together at the top. A block and tackle is hung and a rope and bucket are tied on. Diggers descend the shaft by earth footings (notches) and fill the bucket with washdirt. A mate hauls the bucket to the top.

## **Dryblowing in Desert Areas**

Some gold areas have very low rainfall, and so diggers use dryblowing.

The earth is dug by pick and shovel, and smashed about until it is crumbled. Two iron dishes of about 18 inches (460 millimetres) diameter and 5 inches (130 millimetres) depth are used. An empty dish is put on the ground. The other, filled with worked earth, is held at arm's length above the head. The dish's mouth is turned towards the wind so that light dust is blown away and heavier material is caught in the dish at your feet. This is done a number of times, exchanging the dishes. When only a little material remains, the dish is rotated to bring the lighter pieces to the top. These are picked out and thrown away. A compact heap remains. The digger checks for small nuggets; extracts them; then gently blows away the remainder. Any fine gold lies on the bottom, just under the prospector's nose. Cradles can be used for dryblowing, but the material must be properly crushed so that the shaker can separate gold from waste.

## **Big Mines**

Some mines, like those in Deep Mountains, need many workers and plenty of money to run them. The mine and its machinery must be in safe working order. Big mines require timber supports, pumping systems to drain water, even rail trucks to move rock. Quartz may need to be carted to a stamping battery (a crushing machine), where miners pay to have the ore crushed under the steam-powered hammers. Because of the high costs of mining in such areas, large companies are taking over from diggers as the main extractors of gold. A lot of miners are beginning to work for these companies for wages. Some say that there will soon be no independently-owned shaft mines left in the area.





Figure 9: The final stage of dryblowing



## Town Councils

The larger towns, like Fields Town, have councils. You go to the council chambers to get licences, seek claims and lodge complaints. Attached to the chambers is the Council Office for white-collar officials and councillors who look after the public interest – roads, quality of water, vagabonds, fire control and hotel operation. The Mayor and councillors are chosen from the townspeople. Usually these people already have a business interest in the town. There's little chance that a poor digger or town worker would become a councillor; most are very well-heeled.

Police inspectors and officers, although connected with the councils, are usually located in separate buildings at a police camp. Here there are barracks for the police adjoining the prisoners' "logs".

A law court is held in the Fields Town council's main hall. There is no permanent judge presiding; a travelling magistrate hears cases once every month. Persons under arrest must wait in chains (or locked up) until the magistrate visits.

Try to keep out of the jails. Pay a bribe if necessary, otherwise you'll rot until the magistrate arrives. Then, if you are found guilty, you could be on a chain gang, breaking up rocks to make buildings and pave roads. In court you have to speak for yourself against the police; there are few lawyers and they are ridiculously expensive. A fiver is a good-sized bribe for most troopers – and the best of luck to you.

## Crime and Grog Shops

The grog shops offer some relief to tired, lonely diggers. Some become fighting drunk, but most just relax. Grog shops are illegal, but most are protected by the police – for a fee. One is run by a woman who took four days pushing a wheelbarrow to get to the fields. In the wheelbarrow she had a washing-tub full of bottles. When she arrived, hundreds of diggers surrounded her tent for grog. They say her tent burns down regularly, but she replaces it and the sales continue.

Most people happily tolerate the grog sellers and licence dodgers, and you seldom hear any criticism of the bushrangers. After all, they only rob the government's money – the gold is stolen *after* the diggers have exchanged it for cash. You'll hear plenty of miners laughing about joining the bushrangers to "get their own back" on the police.

Everyone feels differently about tent robbers, claim-jumpers and murderers. Harming your fellows is deeply despised. Diggers take the law into their own hands; there would be many unmarked graves in

the bush because of murders and reprisals that leave no evidence. "Candle-lighters", who sleep by day and loot washdirt by night, could expect to be tarred and feathered at the least. Others are treated more harshly. *The Angus* reported a case where two miners quarrelled over the division of their gold. "An observer spotted a gathering of bushflies and a trickle of blood on the earth under a stretcher. The onlooker bailed up the murderer, attracting a crowd of miners. They found a bloodstained axe and a head. The diggers neglected to drag the offender to the authorities. They fetched a rope and dangled him between heaven and earth."

## Goldfields Women

Many women have been on the fields from the beginning, although there are still a lot more men than women here. Panning and cradling is often a family affair, while some women run shops. Others make clothes or are nurses. Many are astute businesswomen. In fact, they are free women doing similar work to the men, quite unlike the pampered ladies in the cities.

## Chinese

The diggers come from every part of the world. You might find a Yankee fiddler in a hotel one night, a German band the next and a bagpiper the night after that. In crowded places you hear different languages all around you, but most realise that a person's worth depends on more than the way he speaks. Trouble between different nationalities is rare, except in the case of the Chinese miners.

These people keep to themselves and perhaps this is why many diggers distrust them. They were encouraged to come to this country to provide cheap labour, but since the discoveries they have flocked to the fields. They prefer to live in huts made of stone, clay or wood, definitely not tents. They certainly look different, dressed in long blue tunics and baggy trousers, sporting pigtails (which are kept so they may reach heaven), broad mushroom straw hats and long poles on which they carry their loads. The Chinese often fossick in abandoned mullock heaps, where they find specks of gold left by previous miners.

They are quick to make the best of an opportunity. Word has it that a small mud brick hotel stood near one camp – the "Golden Shanty". The owner had scraped earth from a creek bed to build it. He couldn't understand why, years later, the bricks started disappearing. Chinese

fossickers had realised the mud bricks might hold alluvial gold. The place was eventually demolished right under the owner's nose.

The Chinese even work on Sunday, the diggers' day of rest. This infuriates many diggers – the comradeship of the goldfields does not extend to the Chinese. There has been open hostility, but gradually the Chinese are being accepted.

Lin Wu is one of a growing number of Chinese who prefer to set up a business. Lin has grown a vegetable garden outside Fields Town and is marketing his produce on the goldfields. Previously there were no fresh fruit or vegetables, and so this looks to be a surer way of making money than mining.

## **Squatters**

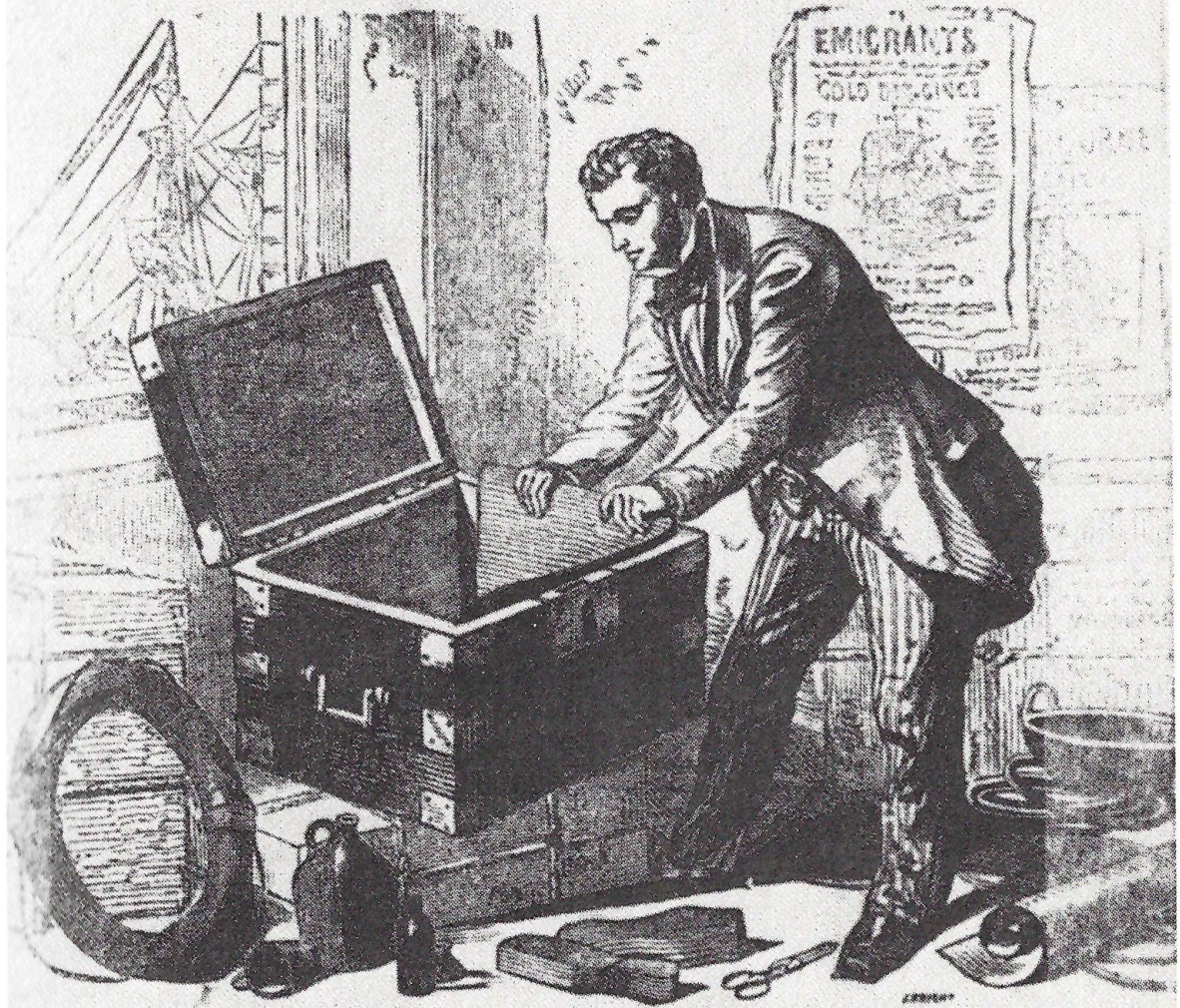
I would prefer to forget most of the "landed gentry" that I've met. They do not like the strains and changes being brought about by the goldrushes. They complain about miners digging up their land (land which is, in fact, owned by the government). They complain about the lack of farm hands (whom they underpay). They seem to want life to provide the best and most profit only for themselves. However, they are brave men and women who have made a success of a hard life in a hard land. They are the ones who have explored and opened up most of the country. They wield great power in politics because of their money and have considerable influence in the colony.

## **Are You a Miner?**

Many prospective diggers are entirely unsuited to the hardships of gold mining. Can you endure these trials? Can you work harder than a navvy? Can you live in a bush hut made of sticks and leaves, with rain pouring through in winter? Can you suffer summer under the burning sun, eaten by flies during the day and plagued by mosquitoes and fleas at night? Are you strong enough to work through rain, hail, sun or snow, eating fly-blown mutton and damper made from sour flour? Can you drink water so thick with mud that a spoon can stand up in it? Will you dig fresh holes week after week, month after month, finding just enough gold to buy food? Can you protect your gold from cut-throats? You will endure all this and more while you wait to make your strike – and your strike may never come.



## TO EMIGRANTS.



The following GUTTA PERCHA ARTICLES will be found of great value to Emigrants, especially such as are proceeding to the

### GOLD DIGGINGS.

#### GUTTA PERCHA LINING FOR BOXES.

BUCKETS.

DRINKING-MUGS.

LIFE-BUOYS.

FLASKS.

WASHING BOWLS.

SYPHONS.

#### GUTTA PERCHA TUBING.

SUCTIONS FOR PUMPS.

JUGS.

CARBOYS FOR GUNPOWDER.

MINERS' CAPS.

#### SOLES FOR BOOTS AND SHOES.

TO KEEP THE FEET DRY is of the utmost importance to the Emigrant. This may be secured by the use of Gutta Percha Soles, which are perfectly Waterproof, cheaper and more durable than Leather. They can be put on with ease by any one. This cannot be too extensively known amongst Australian Emigrants, as it is now difficult to find a Shoemaker in that country.

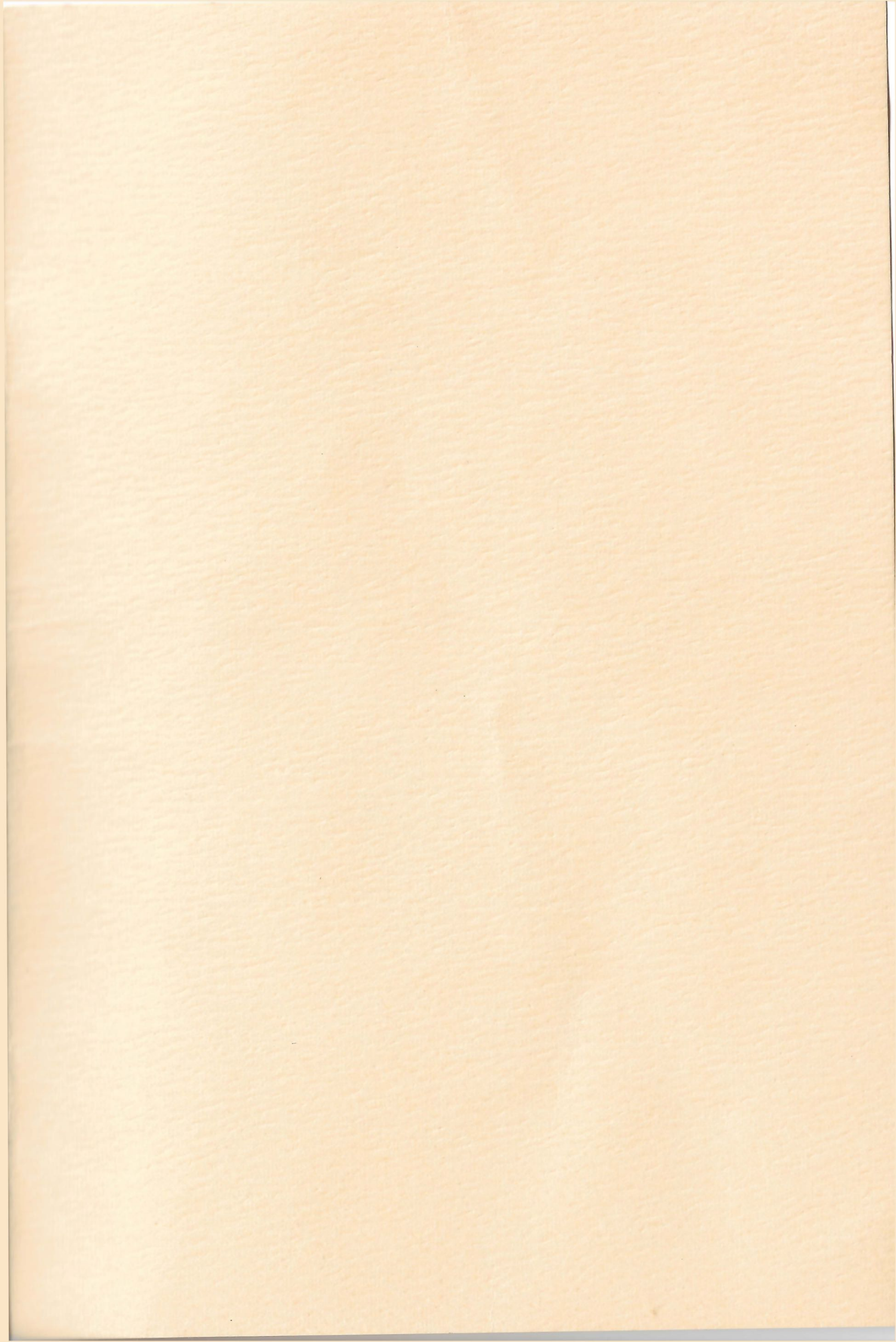
Gold-washing Vessels of every variety of shape may be had to order.

Directions to Emigrants for lining Boxes with Gutta Percha Sheet (so as to preserve the contents from injury by Sea-water), also for putting on Soles of Boots and Shoes, &c., may be had GRATIS on application to any of the Gutta Percha Company's Dealers.

The Gutta Percha Company, Patentees, 19, Wharf-road, City-road. London.









N.W.R. Country Areas Programme  
Dalcanald.